

## Conference on the Czechoslovak Members of the International Brigades

Friday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 in the Palace of the Senate of Parliament of the Czech Republic a research conference took place, dedicated to the issue of Czechoslovak members of the International Brigades (“interbrigadists”).

The main organizer of this event was the *Association of Friends of Interbrigadists* (orig. *Sdružení přátel interbrigadistů*, SPI), which was established in the Czech Republic in the autumn of 2014, mainly thanks to the initiative of WW II veteran col.(ret.) Pavel Vranský. Most members of the Association are the descendants of the Spanish combatants, historians, archivists and members of the public who are interested in this topic. The chairman of the Association is a former MEP and Czech Senator Richard Falbr – himself the son of an interbrigadist. The Association is incorporated under the *Czech Union of Freedom Fighters* (orig. *Český svaz bojovníků za svobodu*, ČSBS), one of the main Czech veterans' organizations.

The conference was prepared jointly by SPI, ČSBS and the Senate. Two Institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences – the Institute of Contemporary History (<http://www.usd.cas.cz/>) and the Institute of History (<http://www.hiu.cas.cz/>) – became the professional guarantors of the conference. The date of the event was symbolic, being as close to the anniversary of the establishment of the International Brigades (October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1936) as possible. The main aim of the conference was to commemorate the next year's eightieth anniversary of the outbreak of the tragic Civil war in Spain.

The conference, organized at such a high level, aroused considerable interest and attention. It was personally attended by President of the Senate, as well as the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Spain and his deputy, a representative of the Embassy of the Russian Federation, and a delegation of partner organizations from Germany, consisting of the descendants of the Czechoslovak interbrigadists of German nationality who, after the Second World War, lived in the former German Democratic Republic.

The academic part of the conference was divided into two blocks. Wide-ranging perspectives of the Spanish Civil War were addressed as a part of the first block. Contributors to this first block included historians Josef Opatrný (*Spain, Civil War and the Atlantic World*), Jiří Chalupa (*Spanish Civil War viewed by Contemporary Historians*), Jindřich Dejmek (*Czechoslovak Foreign Policy and Spanish Civil War*) and Emil Voráček (*Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War*).

The second block was aimed directly at the issue of Czechoslovak interbrigadists. Instead of just describing details of their participation in the events in Spain, the speakers mainly focused on lesser known parts of their life stories, namely on their pre- and post-war fortunes.

The speakers included Radim Gonda (*The attitude of the Czechoslovak state authorities toward the recruiting volunteers for the International Brigades in Spain*), Zdenko Maršálek (*Czechoslovak Interbrigadists as Soldiers of the Second World War*), Jaroslav Bouček (*Fates of the Interbrigadists after the Second World War*) and Jiří Kasl who presented one of the aspects of the “second life” of the topics (*Spanish Civil War in Czech literature in translation*). A debate followed after each of the blocks. The discussions continued during breaks and later on also at the small farewell party over a glass of wine.

The conference was officially concluded by Richard Falbr who, apart from other things, quoted an excerpt from a famous speech by Dolores Ibárruri who thanked interbrigadists for their help in the fall of 1938.

A part of the event was formed by an exhibition of posters from the Spanish Civil War from the collections of the National Archives in Prague.

See also:

<http://senat.cz/zpravodajstvi/zprava.php?id=1973>

<http://www.senat.cz/cinnost/galerie.php?aid=17295>